



When you see this image – just one example of the modern-day slave trade going on all over the world as we speak. **How does it make you feel?**

Imagine a scenario where the owner a particular slave situation, brutally beat one of these children to within an inch of their life. Because this is happening all the time somewhere. This led to calls for the slave owner to meet justice for this crime. But when the child didn't actually die straightaway, he lived for a few days and then died. The owner got off scot free.

How does this make you feel?

And if I was to tell you in all sincerity, that I believe this was the right outcome ... and that I also believe that God would approve and see this as a just outcome. How does this make you feel?

In my defence, do you know why I believe this?

Well because I'm a bible believing kind of guy. I believe in the authority of scripture. And the bible tells me this in today's reading from **Exodus 21:20-21**

20 When a slaveowner strikes a male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies immediately, the owner shall be punished. 21 But if the slave survives a day or two, there is no punishment; for the slave is the owner's property.

Now I'm guessing some of you may already on your phones, emailing the Bishop to tell him that you're seriously concerned about the Theological position and spiritual well-being of Josh Jones. And of course, if I seriously did believe all this that I've just told you ... then you should be writing to the Bishop. And by the way the story about the child isn't true.

But there's a very serious point at stake in all this.

Throughout Christian history, Holy Scripture **has** at times been used to **support, validate and give permission**, for all sorts of horrendous treatment of fellow human beings made in God's image. Giving us, an undeniable truth.



Scripture carelessly used has damaged and abused. And it still does!

Listen to these words and tell me who you think said them.

"My feeling as a Christian, points me to my Lord and Saviour and who, God's truth! was greatest not as a sufferer but as a fighter: in boundless love as a Christian and as a man I read through the passage which tells us how the Lord at last rose in His might and seized the scourge to drive out of the Temple the brood of vipers and adders. Today, after two thousand years, with deepest emotion I recognize more profoundly than ever the fact that it was **for this** that He had to shed His blood upon the Cross."

*"My feeling as a Christian, points me to my Lord and Saviour and who, God's truth! was greatest not as a sufferer but as a fighter. In boundless love as a Christian and as a man, I read through the passage which tells us how the Lord at last rose in His might, to drive out of the Temple the brood of vipers and adders. Today, after two thousand years, with deepest emotion I recognize more profoundly than ever before, the fact that it was **for this** that He had to shed his blood upon the Cross."*

Who do you think said these rousing words?

Well these are the words of one Adolph Hitler.

And those words ... *"it was 'for this' that He had to shed his blood on the Cross."*
What do you think the 'FOR THIS', was?

Well Hitler was referring to this sentence that I left out.

"How terrific was his (Jesus) fight against the Jewish poison"

Hitler found words in Holy Scripture to validate and fuel his desire (and many other's desire) to exterminate and rid the world of what he saw as the Jewish poison. The Jewish infestation.

Now some of you might be thinking. Yeah but these are extreme examples Josh. Well yes but no.



There's a long history down the centuries of scripture verses being used to give permission for Anti-Semitism, which is very perplexing when you think that Jesus was a Jewish man.

In terms of slavery. 1,800 years after Jesus Christ (the author and perfecter of our faith) declared that he'd come to **set the captives free and be good news for the poor and oppressed** ... slavery was still the absolute norm, not just in the world, but also the Christian nations of the World.

Thankfully, enlightened Christians like William Wilberforce, finally persuaded the world to re-think this consign this evil. But it's still a fact that 100 years after abolishing slavery, America who called itself the greatest Christian nation on the planet, were still not allowing Black Americans, the right to vote – or use the same buses, toilets, or restaurants and **even churches** as white people.

And which part of America do you think was most enforcing these anti-Jesus, anti-Christian ways? A place called ironically ... THE BIBLE BELT.

We also know that verses like “**keep women silent**” from St Paul in (1 Cor. 14:34) has been/still is, used to treat and oppress women in church.

Add to these, the many sad tales of harm and damage done in the name of Colonial Christianity and the doctrine called Manifest Destiny. All of which, brutalised indigenous people around the world and has left the scars of trauma for generations to come.

And just in case we think that there are only the big extreme examples, consider these words from this man,



Brazilian footballer **Michael Salazar**. *“If my teacher caught me using my left hand, she would hit me on the head with a dictionary,”*

Based mainly on Matthew 25, where Jesus on judgement day separates the sheep (the good guys) to the right-hand side ... and the goats (the bad guys) to the left-hand side. A belief was spawned in some areas of Christianity that being left-handed was ‘of the devil’.

So, a piece of scripture, that’s actually telling us to treat the least of our brothers and sisters in society with the love of Christ ... became about the sin of being left-handed. And my wife Kim, was beaten with a ruler for 3 years at a Catholic Convent Boarding school, between the ages of 7 to 10 years, for her sin.

And to take it from the ridiculous to the absurd,

Christian Author Phillip Yancey tells a great story of when he was a teenage student at a Bible Belt college, and he’d grown his hair long. The College Principal hauled him into his office quoting St Paul from Corinthians. *“Does not nature itself teach you that if a man wears long hair, it is degrading to him.* The Principal was raging at Yancey, telling him that having long hair wasn’t Christian, and Yancey noticed that behind the principal hanging on the office wall was a picture just like this ...



These are all sobering reminders, that scripture carelessly used has damaged and abused.

And for those on the receiving end, the consequences have been tragic and immeasurable.

But perhaps the most tragic aspect of this misuse of scripture - or more accurately, our failure to obey the authority of scripture - has been the damage inflicted on the church itself. The Body of Christ.

Throughout Christian history, Christians have weaponised scripture to hurt each other. Despite the clear command by Jesus **“to love one another as I have loved you” ... The only obligation you have is to love one another (Romans 13:8)** deep divisions have riddled the body of Christ down the centuries. And you do wonder what Jesus and St Paul would make of today's fragmented divided church, that in their different ways, they both gave their lives to unite.

If Jesus returned tomorrow, would we, His church, be able to look Jesus in the eye and say we made every effort to bow to the authority of scripture, and obey His command to love one another as he loved us?

So, this is the risk of scripture.

And given the cost to human lives, can we really afford to not take this risk seriously?

It's a really important question for our times. Because one of the reasons people have fallen away from Church and their faith – is because of a loss of confidence in the Bible.

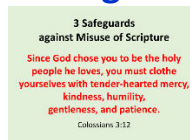
So, we need to do the hard and important work, of knowing HOW to understand scripture, so that we can proclaim it confidently.

HOW CAN WE MAKE SURE, THAT WE ARE NOT PART OF THIS MISUSE OF SCRIPTURE?

How do we proclaim God's word, in ways that HEAL and not HARM?

**I want to suggest 3 ways this morning,
that for me are the ultimate safeguards against misuse of scripture.**

- **The first thing we need to do is take heed of these words from St Paul in today's reading Colossians 3:12**



Since God chose you to be the holy people he loves, you must clothe yourselves with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience. Above everything clothe yourselves in love.

Let's talk about humility first.

Is there anyone here who believes that we've now arrived at a time in Christian history when we have it all sorted? That we are now so enlightened, that there's never any danger that we could use God's word to cause harm and hurt people. **Being aware that we may still be doing this, is the first safeguard to help us not do it.**

I've ministered full time now for 16 years now, and I have to say I've met countless people who in different ways have been hurt and damaged by unthinking use of scripture. I've heard their stories and witnessed the tears of their ongoing trauma.

What this experience has done to me, is make me absolutely determined to never be part of this. I didn't become a Priest to diminish people, I wanted to lead people to Jesus and the fullness of life.

So how do I guard against the misuse of scripture?

Well I always aspire to try and proclaim God's word, through the spirit of **tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience and love**". Because I have yet to meet anyone, who's been harmed or damaged by these Godly qualities.

Have you ever felt diminished by someone's use of scripture towards you? Or maybe even your own understanding of scripture has left you troubled and burdened?

THE SECOND safeguard is this.



CHECK OUT THE FRUIT

In today's passage from Matthew 7:16 Jesus gives us one of the biggest truths for any walk of life. 17 **Every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit.**

Or as my mum always used to say... "the proof of the pudding is in the eating."

A sure way to recognize if something is truly of God, is by the kind of fruit it produces. God's Truth - **always** leads to the fruit of healing and restoration. It's life-giving.

If our use of scripture is any way damaging, diminishing ... then it's bad fruit. No if's - no but's.

Slavery - anti-semitism - racism of all kinds - oppression of women - divisions in the church - the beating for children for being left-handed, or any condemnation of anyone that leaves them broken and harmed ... these are all bad fruits sown by the

seeds of the misuse of scripture. Using scripture without the spirit of tender-hearted mercy kindness and love.

As you look around today, where do you see people being damaged and harmed by careless use of scripture and a lack of tender-hearted mercy and kindness?

- **THE FINAL and the ultimate safeguard against a wrong understanding and use of scripture is this.**

We must filter every verse and passage of scripture, through the Supremacy of Christ and the Supremacy of Love.

For me this is goes to very heart of things.

The supremacy of Christ, and the supremacy of love, are one and the same thing.

If as 1 John tells us unequivocally, that **God is love**, then Jesus the Son of God, one part of the Holy Trinity and the image of the invisible God – is love personified.

Let me ask 3 questions for all of us to ponder.

• What is the Christian's source of ultimate authority?
The bible gives us the answer in Matthew 28: 18
"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, Jesus."
• What is the Christian's source for truth?
John 14: 6
"I am the way, the truth and the life."
• What is the foundation of the Christian faith?
"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."
1 Corinthians 3: 11

- **What is the Christian's source of ultimate authority?**

The answer is that it's not the bible. The bible gives us the answer.

Matthew 28: 18 **"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me, Jesus."**

- **What is the Christian's source for truth?**

Again, the bible gives us the answer.

John 14: 6 **"I am the way, the truth and the life."**

- **What is the foundation of the Christian faith?**

"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ." 1 Corinthians 3:11

The Message, Inspiration and Gift of Scripture, reveals and points us to the supremacy of Jesus Christ.
"You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to Me!"
John 5: 39

- The **Message**, the **Inspiration** and the **Gift** of Scripture, is that that scripture points us to the supremacy of Jesus Christ. In case we still doubt this, listen to Jesus Himself in our verse for the day from John 5:39 **"You search the Scriptures because you think they give you eternal life. But the Scriptures point to Me!**

So, looking through the lens of this supremacy, how does this shape the way we read scripture?

Well let's take those verses in the bible that appear to show God condoning violence. These have been problematic for many people. How do we see Jesus responding?

When the guards come to arrest Jesus in Gethsemane and Peter cut off the guard's ear. What does Jesus do? He tells Peter, **"no more of this' ...** then heals and restores the guard's ear.

When the Samaritan village fail to welcome Jesus and his disciples wanted to reign down fire and burn them up like Elijah did. What did Jesus do?

Well he rebuked them and told them, "you have the wrong spirit in you?"

And when humanity savaged Jesus with the violence of the Cross, what did Jesus do? Jesus never once struck back with violence. He met hatred and fear with tender-hearted mercy forgiveness and love.

- **All those passages in the Bible that have been used to make some people scapegoats or unworthy of inclusion. How does Jesus respond.**

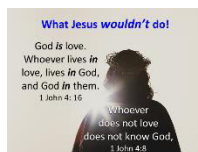
Without fail, he walks towards them in the way of inclusion and healing.

Wherever there's a group of people, who are being marginalized, excluded, harmed or hurt. Be it lepers, women, Samaritans, Roman soldiers, whoever. Jesus meets them with tender-hearted mercy, kindness, patience and love.

NO-ONE - ever encounters Jesus and comes away harmed. They are always healed and restored.

The only people who come away from Jesus feeling bruised, are the self-righteous religious people, who Jesus says are burdening the ordinary people with their misuse of scripture.

FINISH WITH THIS



The old adage ... what would Jesus do? Is still a great question. And even if we may not always know what Jesus would do, we can be pretty sure from scripture of what Jesus **wouldn't do** to someone.

All those instances I gave earlier, of scripture being used to harm and damage **could not** have happened, if they were truly being measured against the supremacy of Christ and the supremacy of love.

So when we see people today, taking verses of scripture and using them in isolation to validate and give permission for violence, hatred, slavery, oppression, condemnation and exclusion. In ways that are clearly doing harm ... we filter them through the supremacy of Christ and Godly Love.

Because then we can see them for the travesty that they really are.

The Light of Christ and love will always pierce the darkness of hurt and harm.

To Sum up

- Scripture carelessly used has damaged and abused

Given the cost to human lives, can we really afford to not take this risk seriously?

How do we proclaim God's word, in ways that HEAL and not HARM?

- Proclaim God's word at all times, through a spirit tender-hearted mercy, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.
 - Above everything clothe yourselves in love.

- CHECK THE FRUIT – We can recognize if something is truly of God, it's fruit. If the way we proclaim God's word leads to the fruit of healing, restoration and is life-giving, it's a fruit of the Spirit... if damages or diminishes... it's not.

- Filter everything through the lens of the supremacy of Christ and love.

I'll leave the last words to the Apostle John

16 God is love. Whoever lives *in* love, lives *in* God, and God *in* them. 1 John 4: 16

Whoever *does not love - does not know God*, because *God is love*. 1 John 4:8